

## CLAIMS

1. Distribution support equipment configured to be run with use of a computer system and customer-side equipment accessible to the computer system through a communication channel for supporting distribution related to business dealings among customers, distributors including dealers and wholesalers, and suppliers, characterized by comprising:

customer specifying means for specifying a customer who has made access to the computer system from the customer-side equipment;

route specifying means for specifying each of merchandise distribution routes for plural sorts of merchandise by separating one route from another upon receipt of order signals from the customer specified by the customer specifying means to deliver the plural sorts of merchandise to the customer; and

information processing means for making arrangements for providing the customer with merchandise items meeting the order signals through respective merchandise distribution routes specified by the route specifying means.

2. The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1, wherein the route specifying means is configured to separate the merchandise distribution routes from each other on the basis of the product number and category of each of the merchandise items according to predetermined settings.

- Sub A 25 3. The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 1 or 2, the information processing means is provided with directed-at-dealer ordering means for automatically placing

orders to dealers serving as order receivers of respective merchandise routes according to the order signals received from the customer at a time.

4. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the information processing means is provided with directed at supplier and wholesaler ordering means for allowing a dealer having received orders from the customer to automatically place orders to different suppliers or wholesalers depending upon product numbers and categories of ordered merchandise items according to predetermined settings.

5. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the information processing means is provided with shipment instruction means for allowing a dealer having received orders from the customer to automatically give shipment instructions to different deliverers depending upon areas and ordered merchandise items according to predetermined settings.

6. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 5, which is provided with selling price setting means for automatically setting a final selling price of a merchandise item for a customer giving an order for the merchandise item by adding a profit ratio for a distributor involved in a merchandise distribution route specified by the route specifying means to a selling price set by a supplier.

7. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 6, which is provided with sales and buying

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management means for managing unit selling price and unit buying price for each distributor or supplier according to predetermined settings while automatically providing each distributor with sales and buying information based on delivery information.

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8. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 7, which is provided with billing support means for automatically calculating expenses and providing a billed part with information of the expenses thus calculated according to billing conditions stored in a billing condition database storing various billing conditions in relation to delivery, distribution and the like when the billed part wants the information.

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9. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 8, which is provided with billing and payment management support means for supporting billing and payment management at each supplier or distributor on the basis of sales and buying information according to predetermined settings.

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20 10. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 9, which is provided with task apportion support means for allowing dealers to apportion a power of setting in respect of sharing of tasks inherent to a dealer function including customer's ID setting, customer selling price  
25 setting and delivery condition setting on a task-by-task basis according to an agreement previously made between the plurality of dealers having overlapping tasks.

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11. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 10, which is provided with purchasing management means for automatically performing purchasing management of a customer according to purchasing management conditions determined by a combination of the customer and customer information specified by the customer specifying means and the product number of a merchandise item ordered by the customer.

12. The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 11, wherein the purchasing management means is provided with purchased merchandise classification management means for automatically setting and managing an account item code used in an organization to which the customer belongs depending upon a combination of the customer and customer information comprising a budget management unit in the organization specified by the customer specifying means and the product number of a merchandise item ordered by the customer.

13. The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 11 or 12, wherein the purchasing management means is provided with approval route management means for automatically performing purchasing management related to a judgment as to whether or not approval is necessary, a maximum sum of money not requiring approval, an approver, an approval route and the like according to purchase regulations stipulated by the organization to which a customer belongs depending upon a combination of the customer and customer information specified by the customer specifying means and the product

number of a merchandise item ordered by the customer.

14. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 11 to 13, wherein the purchasing management means is provided with power setting means for managing the entitlement of a customer to placing orders in an organization to which the customer belongs while judging whether each customer is entitled to a referencing power or an ordering power.

15. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 11 to 14, wherein the purchasing management means is provided with manager support means for providing a manager in an organization to which a customer belongs with purchasing information of each customer in the organization thereby allowing the manager conduct centralized management of a purchase budget of the organization.

16. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 15, which is provided with customer-by-customer based menu management means for enabling customization of setting of a picture displayed on the customer-side equipment and necessary functions of the customer-side equipment on a customer-by-customer basis.

17. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 16, which is provided with free form ordering means for allowing a customer to designate a previously registered dealer to which the customer is capable of addressing an inquiry about an order for a merchandise item which has previously not been established through the customer-side equipment as well as for performing sales management handling

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the merchandise item as a special handling merchandise item according to an agreement made between the customer and the dealer in relation to the inquiry.

18. The distribution support equipment in accordance with  
5 any one of claims 1 to 17, which is provided with  
customer-by-customer based merchandise setting means for  
establishing at least settings of original categories, names and  
the like of merchandise items on a customer-by-customer basis  
aside from categories and names of handleable merchandise  
10 items established in the computer system as well as for enabling  
merchandise item retrieval based on the settings thus made.

19. The distribution support equipment in accordance with  
any one of claims 1 to 18, which is provided with customer's set  
product number management means for allowing a customer to  
15 establish a plurality of product numbers as a set aside from  
product numbers of merchandise items established in the  
computer system thereby enabling management based on a  
customer's own single set product number and to place an order  
also based on the set product number.

20. The distribution support equipment in accordance with  
any one of claims 1 to 19, which is provided with supplier's set  
product number management means for establishing a set of  
product numbers of plural merchandise items for which a  
supplier is capable of receiving an order if the merchandise  
25 items are combined into a finished product and which are  
established as plural merchandise items in the computer system  
thereby enabling an order based on a single set product number.

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21. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 20, which is provided with automatic delivery time calculation means for automatically calculating a due date for delivery of a merchandise item ordered by a customer by referencing at least delivery situation of a deliverer and working dates of the customer.
22. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 21, which is provided with application support means for registering an unspecified number of users having made contact with the computer system as customers, capable of business dealing through the computer system, the application support means having a function allowing a user to designate a specific dealer by referencing data of dealers previously registered when the user applies for registration.
23. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 22, which is provided with customer registration means for allowing a dealer designated by a user to register the user as a customer of the dealer in the computer system.
24. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 23, which is provided with merchandise information database maintenance means for storing information of handleable merchandise items in a merchandise information database incorporated in the computer system and allowing a supplier contacting the computer system to register information of at least merchandise items supplied from the supplier itself in the merchandise information database or renew the information

registered in the database.

25. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 24, which is provided with purchasing system linkage means for linking up with other distribution support equipment and providing customers utilizing the other distribution support equipment with merchandise information stored in the computer system as information of an original merchandise assortment and purchase prices previously established on a customer-by-customer basis by matching merchandise categories established in the computer system with those established in the other distribution support equipment.

26. The distribution support equipment in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 25, which is provided with supplier linkage means for linking up with a supplier having an original computer system accumulating its own merchandise information to obtain the merchandise information through the computer system of the distribution support equipment.

27. The distribution support equipment in accordance with claims 26, wherein the supplier linkage means is configured to enable the merchandise information accumulated in the supplier's computer system to be utilized as merchandise information of the computer system of the distribution support equipment by synchronizing the merchandise categories established in the computer system of the distribution support system with those established in the supplier's computer system and applying a ratio variable price established for each merchandise category to a selling price of a merchandise item

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*Ad.* belonging to each merchandise category established in the  
supplier's computer system.

28. Distribution support equipment configured to be run with  
use of a computer system and customer-side equipment  
5 accessible to the computer system through a communication  
channel for supporting distribution related to business dealings  
among customers, distributors including dealers and wholesalers,  
and suppliers, characterized by comprising:

customer specifying means for specifying a customer who  
10 has made access to the computer system from the customer-side  
equipment; and

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purchasing management means for automatically  
performing purchasing management on a customer-by-customer  
basis according to preset purchasing management conditions  
15 determined by a combination of the customer specified by the  
customer specifying means and a product number of a  
merchandise item ordered by the customer.

29. Distribution support equipment configured to be run with  
use of a computer system and customer-side equipment  
20 accessible to the computer system through a communication  
channel, characterized by comprising:

customer specifying means for specifying a customer who  
has made access to the computer system from the customer-side  
equipment;

25 route specifying means for specifying each of business  
transaction routes for plural sorts of services by separating one  
route from another upon receipt of order signals at a time from

the customer specified by the customer specifying means to provide the customer with the plural sorts of services; and

information processing means for making arrangements for providing the customer with the services meeting the order signals through respective business transaction routes specified by the route specifying means.

30. The distribution support equipment in accordance with claim 29, which is provided with purchasing management means for automatically performing purchasing management on a customer-by-customer basis according to preset purchasing management conditions determined by a combination of the customer specified by the customer specifying means and the sorts of services ordered by the customer.

31. Distribution support equipment configured to be run with use of a computer system and customer-side equipment accessible to the computer system through a communication channel, characterized by comprising:

customer specifying means for specifying a customer who has made access to the computer system from the customer-side equipment; and

purchasing management means for automatically performing purchasing management on a customer-by-customer basis according to preset purchasing management conditions determined by a combination of the customer specified by the customer specifying means and sorts of services ordered by the customer.